



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Using Teleconference for Training Program Committees

"A teleconference can bring any resource person to your committee meeting . . . in seconds."

Teleconferencing is a method of "distance learning." This method is useful when an "in-person" presentation is not possible when you need it. Teleconferencing as referred to in this guide is "audio conferencing," which means verbal communications via telephone.

How Teleconference Works

Teleconferencing works much like a regular telephone call. The resource person (specialist) talks to your group or committee over the telephone. You will use Extension's portable teleconference equipment which connects to a telephone jack at your meeting site. The incoming voice is amplified through a large speaker enabling everyone to hear clearly. A microphone is provided so that participants can ask questions to the specialist, usually from where they are seated.

How to Make Arrangements

1. Contact the program development specialist as far in advance as possible, at least 3 to 4 weeks ahead of time. Set a meeting date, time and other program details.

If you want the specialist to place the call for the teleconference, provide the phone number where the (teleconference) meeting will be held.

2. Contact a communications specialist in the Agricultural Communications Department (TAMU campus) to reserve the teleconference equipment. It will be sent to you a few days in advance of your requested date.

3. Select a local meeting facility which has a plug-in telephone (the telephone unplugs from the wall plate). Teleconference equipment comes with a 15 to 20 foot extension cord for accessing a telephone in/near the meeting room. Instructions on connecting and using the teleconference equipment are provided.

In meeting locations where incoming calls go through a switchboard, special arrangements may have to be made to receive the call.

4. If the specialist plans to send visuals for you to show during the teleconference, make arrangements for appropriate equipment (such as an overhead projector, slide projector, screen, etc.).
5. Arrange advance time with the specialist to test the teleconference equipment at your meeting location. This can be done the day before or a few hours before the teleconference begins.

What to Do During the Teleconference

1. The local moderator sets the stage. Allow enough time (10 to 15 minutes) before the teleconference begins for the chairperson to open the committee meeting. Explain what will happen, introduce resource person(s) and topic(s). Complete any other details.
2. Most likely an agent will manage the microphone throughout the teleconference. Perhaps a member or another agent can put up visuals and do other tasks.
3. If a slide of the speaker is provided, have it showing on the screen when the resource person begins to talk.

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4. If the committee is not too large (fewer than 12 to 15 people), members may be asked to introduce themselves.
5. Show visuals as cued by the resource person. Usually the visuals are numbered for easy identification.
6. If handouts are provided, distribute to participants when specified.
7. Relay questions or comments from the group or let committee members ask them directly to the resource person.

Committees to Involve

Any Extension Program Council unit can take part, including the following:

- ☐ Council officers
- ☐ One program committee
- ☐ Two or more program committees together
- ☐ All program committee chairpersons
- ☐ Executive board members

Program Development Topics to Cover

These are a few examples of topics which may be discussed:

- ☐ Long-range and annual planning
- ☐ Planning productive meetings
- ☐ Program implementation and evaluation
- ☐ Designing effective programs
- ☐ Role and functions of committees
- ☐ How to analyze situations
- ☐ Duties of members, chairpersons and officers
- ☐ Management of committees
- ☐ Problem identification
- ☐ Setting program priorities

A written outline or resource material will help participants in understanding the topic being discussed. Try to focus on just one topic in a training session.

Advantages of Using Teleconference

Even though it's different from in-person methods, committee members will be intrigued by the technique and want to see how the teleconference works.

- ☐ Teleconferences are easier to schedule than in-person visits because no traveling is involved—you're more likely to get who you want when you most need them.
- ☐ A teleconference can be as effective as the in-person method, when visuals and a slide picture of the speaker are shown. Participants can ask questions, just as when the speaker is there.
- ☐ Resource persons can explain a procedure or provide technical information that the agent may not feel comfortable handling.
- ☐ It's cost-effective. When the specialist places the call, you have no cost. Teleconference is less expensive than traveling for the specialist.
- ☐ A teleconference can be conducted in daytime or at night, the same as in-person specialist visits.

Tips for an Effective Teleconference

Don't plan a long teleconference on your first try. Shorter teleconferences, about 15 to 30 minutes at most, may be better. If visuals and handouts are used along with intermittent local discussion, longer teleconferences can also be effective.

It's possible to involve two or more resource persons in different TAMU campus offices during the same teleconference. Check on how to arrange this conference call when using the TAEX equipment.

Before using the teleconference with a large group, such as at the Extension Program Council annual meeting, test the equipment in the room where the meeting will be held. Test to make sure everyone can hear—it may not be effective in a large meeting room.

Encourage members to ask questions and/or make comments. Think ahead about possible questions to ask the resource person. Teleconferences are most effective when members take part. Either the agent can relay questions or members can ask them directly.

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin.

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